

Zachary Macaulay (1768-1838): The Faith of an Abolitionist

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A turbulent life

There is a bust in Westminster Abbey of Zachary Macaulay one of the key figures in the movement to abolish slavery in the British Empire. For all that, he did not rate a mention in the royal service in the abbey in 2007 which marked the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade or in commemorative stamps which featured some who had played a part in the campaign. His name has often simply been cited as the father of the celebrated Lord (Thomas) Macaulay, his oldest son, politician, colonial administrator and historian. Thomas Fowell Buxton, successor to William Wilberforce as the leader of the abolitionists in Parliament, paid tribute to him in 1833 as “the anti-slavery tutor of us all”.¹

Zachary Macaulay was born in May 1768 in the manse of Inverary, Argyll of several generations of west highland ministers. Educated at home in his early years he worked as a clerk in a Glasgow merchant house until, in the words of his later journal “the only way to extricate myself from the labyrinth in which I was involved” was the path often taken by young house men – to go to the Indies.² For five years he worked as a bookkeeper (slave overseer) in Jamaica, being at first revolted by the cruelty of the system but then adapting to it with indifference, something which plagued him with guilt all his life. Macaulay returned to Britain but not to Scotland. Both his parents were dead. His older sister Jean had married Thomas Babington, squire of Rothley Temple in Leicestershire, where one of his brothers, Auley,

¹ Charles Buxton, *Memoirs of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton* (Philadelphia, 1849), 271.

² Macaulay Journal 2, January–May 1797 Macaulay Papers, Huntington Library (MP HL). All the information on Zachary Macaulay’s early life is contained in lengthy journal/letters written to his fiancé, Selina Mills in 1797.

was Rector of the parish church. Rothley Temple was to become a turning point in the life of Zachary Macaulay. Not only did his brother-in-law exercise an enormous influence on his life (Zachary named his oldest son Thomas Babington) but he exercised huge patience in hosting what his daughter described as “a disagreeable, conceited youth, with self sufficient dogmatic manners”.³

Rothley Temple was a centre of the infant movement for the abolition of the infamous slave trade. William Wilberforce was a regular visitor and there is a room in what is now a Rothley Court Hotel where he was reputed to have drafted many of his speeches on the trade. Henry Thornton – banker, Member of Parliament and Chairman of the Sierra Leone Company which sought to establish a colony of free blacks in the centre of the West African human traffic – who was to be with Wilberforce and Macaulay a member of the evangelical “Clapham Sect”, was a close associate of Babington in the Parliamentary campaign. All three decided that the young Zachary Macaulay could make a contribution to the running of the colony. In 1792 he sailed for Africa and in just over a year found himself Governor of Sierra Leone at the age of twenty-five.

Some modern chroniclers have been quick to condemn Macaulay in Sierra Leone and write him off with the caricature of Christianity and of Scots as a narrow, dour, and joyless “Presbyterian”.⁴ Raw he was and his inexperience led him to many errors of judgement. But he was running a colony of free slaves from America who naturally chafed against any controls, in the midst of a hostile coastline run by slave traders. Local chiefs, often themselves slavers, were the original landlords and for almost all of his time in Sierra Leone Britain was at war with France. Months after he took office the colony was invaded and partly sacked by French ships. That he held Sierra Leone together

³ Viscountess Knutsford, *Life and Letters of Zachary Macaulay* (London, 1900), 15.

⁴ A classic example of this is found in Simon Schama's *Rough Crossings: Britain, The Slaves, and the American Revolution* (London, 2005).

and has been seen as one of the more successful governors was some feat and one which is recognised by more careful historians.⁵

On his final return home from the colony in 1799 Macaulay was immediately involved in giving evidence to the House of Lords enquiry into the slave trade. He married Selina Mills, daughter of a Quaker merchant in Bristol, and became Secretary to the Sierra Leone Company and its successor, the African Institution. For a time he was himself a highly successful merchant who accompanied trade with philanthropy and increasingly with research and writing on slavery. In the early 1800s Macaulay edited the Anglican evangelical journal *The Christian Observer*, but undoubtedly his greatest achievement was in the singlehanded running of a journal that provided both information and encouragement to groups campaigning for the abolition of slavery and ammunition for those fighting for it in Parliament.

The Anti-Slavery Reporter was started in 1825 and reached a circulation of nearly 40,000 by the height of the campaign in the early 1830s. In the first of his many pamphlets on slavery 1823 Macaulay wrote "our object is simply to expose the enormity of the evils of negro slavery, with a view to excite the attention of the public, and through them of Parliament to the subject".⁶ This he did with an almost superhuman work rate and deadly accuracy. Zachary Macaulay never made a speech or addressed a rally but his close friend and ally in the cause Lord Brougham rated him as the most feared and hated foe of the pro-slavery interests. His evidence came from long hours of perusing the minutiae in West Indian papers and colonial reports and he stated it boldly and baldly – it was incontrovertible. Moreover he wrote with an authority born of close contact both with the slave trade and plantation

⁵ This is the judgment of the late Dr Christopher Fyfe in his *History of Sierra Leone* (Oxford, 1962).

⁶ Zachary Macaulay, *Negro Slavery or a view of some of the more prominent features of that State of Society as it exists in the United States of America and in the Colonies of the West Indies* (London, 1823), 117.

slavery, sharing the latter with another veteran of anti-slavery, James Stephen, who described him as the “sheet anchor” of their cause.⁷

Ecumenical complexity abroad

Undoubtedly it was the strength of his faith and the inherited Scottish quality of “thrawnness” which enabled him to persist in the cause which by 1830 seemed to be highly unlikely to succeed. Wilberforce, never a well man, had become very frail and James Stephen confessed that he felt no longer able to go on. Macaulay wrote to him three days after the death of his own wife – “Defeat I regard not. Let us do our duty and leave the issue to Him who ordereth all events ... you dread failure. I have no such dread”.⁸

It would of course be a great mistake to assume that Zachary Macaulay’s faith journey and its outworking in his life’s work were anything but complex and at times contradictory. It took the isolation of Sierra Leone and the passionate love and trust with which he held his fiancée in England to unlock the thick spiritual gate of this essentially private and inhibited man. Selina was a woman of both patience and spirit and their marriage was as close to an equal one as could be in those days. Through his extensive correspondence with her across the seas, he explored theological and denominational issues, explored his own defects, encouraged the new hymns of Isaac Watts and the old doctrines of Calvinism, and became sceptical of much contemporary philosophy.

As one of the younger members of the large manse family at Cardross, Zachary appears to have received little affection, though a good classical education, from his father. John Macaulay belonged to the establishment Moderate party in the Church of Scotland which was austere and suspicious of any “enthusiasm” in worship. Some of his congregation complained about his failure to adhere to and teach the harsher doctrines of the Westminster Confession. Zachary retained a

⁷ James Stephen to Zachary Macaulay, 9 March 1830, MP HL Box 12.

⁸ Zachary Macaulay to James Stephen, 7 May 1831, MP HL. Box 13.

suspicion of extreme Calvinism all his life and tended to admire and befriend ministers for other qualities despite the doctrinal hardness that was part of their makeup.

Macaulay once wrote to his mentor Henry Thornton, the Chairman of the Sierra Leone Company, that he was not a Predestinarian, Presbyterian or “a stickler for Paedobaptism”.⁹ Predestinarianism was of course a plank of rigid Calvinism and the belief that only the “elect” would enter heaven regardless of the faith of others, was not conducive to his wider theological vision, which nonetheless depended on the acceptance of faith in Jesus Christ to achieve salvation. The baptism of infants was axiomatic within the Church of Scotland where he was brought up and even on the evangelical wing of the Church of England where his allegiance now lay. He may have been tempted by some of the doctrines of the Baptist church and he valued their spiritual rigour, but he could not accept the exclusivity of baptism only being offered to adult believers.

As Governor of Sierra Leone Macaulay was effectively chief executive of a social enterprise that was so akin to a colony that when in 1808 the British Government took it over officially the difference for the inhabitants was not great. It was originally the vision of the veteran abolitionist Granville Sharp to provide both an opportunity for ex-slaves to enjoy a new life of freedom and be an example to the world of the “civilising of Africa”. Unfortunately and understandably its first settlers from Nova Scotia who had fled slavery in the American War of Independence, now found themselves under more controls than they cared for, especially in the area of religion. Not only were the company’s official chaplains limited to ministers of the Church of England or the Church of Scotland but they alone were licensed to conduct weddings. Ironically in 1799 when giving evidence to the House of Lords, Zachary Macaulay faced criticism for not giving selecting chaplains solely from the Church of England, the only proper source for many of their English lordships.

⁹ Zachary Macaulay to Henry Thornton, 20 December 1797, MP HL Box.2.

He was bound to support the work of the established chaplains although privately he was sometimes critical. He immediately took to the Church of England chaplain in his early days in the colony, the Rev. Melville Horne. In his 1793 Journal he commended a sermon preached by Horne on "the withering of Jeroboam's hand" accompanied by observations on the sin of making incantations to the "spirits", which was seen as a reason for "signal calamities" being visited on the African coast. The sermon, Macaulay observed without a trace of irony, "could not fail of producing happy effects amongst the African population".¹⁰ When he was Governor he was less complimentary about the preaching of the Rev. John Clarke from the Church of Scotland, the one whose appointment had led to the comment¹¹ in the House of Lords. Macaulay commented that Clarke's academic education led his exposition of scripture to go "far beyond the comprehension of his hearers. 'I take care to remind him of it,' he wrote rather pompously 'whenever I find him soaring out of sight.'"¹²

Macaulay himself preached a number of times when the chaplain was ill or absent. We have no record of his sermons but it would not be a surprise to find them dry. He saw his responsibility for the religious health of the colony but his pastoral technique was not always of the best. Writing in his Journal in 1797 he recorded a particularly inept encounter. At the end of January 1797 he visited a man who was dying of consumption and was clearly frightened of his impending death. The lesson which the redoubtable Governor was attempting to impart was, in his view, rather irritatingly interrupted by the man's cries for mercy and his "lamentations". He was unable to name and list his sins but Zachary obliged with a very full list, again amazed at his "ignorance". After an hour and a half, having further elaborated on sin, he had to

¹⁰ Macaulay Journal, 1, 29 September 1793, MP HL Box 19.

¹¹ House of Lords Sessional Papers, 25 July 1799, vol. 3, 357/8. One peer even suggested that he "only looked (for a Chaplain) in dissenting places". This betrayed considerable ignorance in characterizing Church of Scotland ministers as "dissenters".

¹² Knutsford, *Life and Letters*, 141.

leave but he directed the man's wife to send for the colony's chaplain. No doubt it was well meant but it is doubtful if it was helpful to the poor man.¹³

Hard though he was on his own Christian shortcomings he tended to transfer that judgmental attitude to others. David George, Baptist preacher and former American slave, had been a staunch defender of the Governor in Sierra Leone, and acted as a "go between" for Macaulay and many of the settlers who chafed at his rule. He was often regarded as "The Governor's man" by other co-religionists. Macaulay should have been sensitive to this and appreciative of his support. But when David George protested against the ban on marriages celebrated by Baptist preachers in the settler community, instead of dealing quietly with the veteran religious leader he lambasted him for his sins and threatened him with retribution over the "mischief which his intemperance might cause". His Journal entry describing this was insufferable in its rectitude and Macaulay seemed on this occasion to be unwilling to consider that he himself had not handled the matter well.¹⁴

Macaulay was anxious to avoid denominational bias. Commenting on the colony in a London magazine he wrote "here we are not Presbyterian but Christians".¹⁵ There were of course Christians and Christians. Not long after his arrival back in the colony he told Selina

We have much to encounter from ignorance and prejudice on the part of many of the settlers, more especially of those among them who are Methodist. Methodism has so direct a tendency to exalt animal feelings to undue empire over the judgement, that with people of weak judgement and of little or no knowledge, it may be expected with most cases to produce enthusiasm.¹⁶

¹³ Macaulay Journal, 1, 30 January 1797, MP HL Box 19.

¹⁴ Macaulay Journal, 1, 24 August 1796, MP HL Box 19.

¹⁵ Writing in the *Evangelical Magazine*, vol 4, 1796, 163.

¹⁶ Zachary Macaulay to Selina Macaulay, 27 May, MP HL Box 1.

Enthusiasm in religion was anathema to Zachary Macaulay. There was an inevitable clash between his control of official religion and those who claimed their rights, especially the Methodists who had a number of local congregations in the colony and whose interests were defended by an English missionary, John Garvin. For several years there was a power struggle between the missionary and the Governor which Macaulay won after putting Garvin on trial before a Committee of Enquiry on charges of injuring the interests of the colony, disturbing the peace, and libel against the Governor. It was a pyrrhic victory, because although it exiled from the colony one who undoubtedly made a profession of wild agitation, it deepened the resentment against the Company from a large religious community.

At times Zachary Macaulay had a no-nonsense approach to religion. One settler told Macaulay that a plant growing on his land had been revealed to him by the Lord to be a chocolate plant. He helpfully left it at the Governor's house. Macaulay questioned him as to whether he had ever seen a chocolate plant growing anywhere. He admitted that he had not but that it was revealed to him "by the spirit". They set off for the place of discovery. "On getting there," wrote Macaulay, "I found the plant not to bear the most remote affinity to the chocolate plant [he may have meant cocoa beans] and therefore ventured to tell him that the spirit which spoke to him was a lying spirit".¹⁷

The guilt and the redemption

This intensely private man only really bared his soul to the love of his life, Selina Mills. To no one else could he have confessed his guilt-ridden past and what he felt was his turning away from God as he associated with students in Glasgow who lionised David Hume for his scepticism and later in the West Indies when he fell into the culture of indifference to anything but the way of life there. He wrote these words

¹⁷ Macaulay Journal, 1, 24 August 1796, MP HL Box 19.

from Jamaica to a friend in Scotland in 1785 but we only see them when reported to Selina from Sierra Leone

You would hardly know your friend ... were you to view me in a field of canes amidst perhaps a hundred of the sable race, cursing and bawling, while the noise of the whip resounding on their shoulders and the cries of the poor wretches, would make you imagine that some unlucky accident had carried you to the doleful shades.

His reflections on those days to his fiancée speak of his “callous indifference” both to God and to “the miseries of the negroes”, referring to these with “a levity which sufficiently marked my depravity”. He was reminded, he said of Virgil’s dictum “easy is the descent to Hell” and he told Selina “I can scarce ever think of my past life to those words of John Newton”:

Thou didst once a wretch behold
In rebellion blindly bold
Scorn thy grace, Thy power defy
That poor rebel, Lord.

He continued, “I am indeed a signal monument to God’s long-suffering and tender mercy”.¹⁸

Macaulay felt that he had been “a brand plucked from the burning” by his association with the Rothley circle and especially with his brother-in-law, Thomas Babington, who took this raw colonial young man in hand in a gentle but persuasive way. Apart from Selina, Macaulay was closer to Babington than anyone else in his life but the development or rekindling of his faith owed more to a gradual influence than to any dramatic conversion. This gentle influence was reflected again in Macaulay’s correspondence with Selina across the seas. “What an amiable man is Babington,” he said, “surely there are few souls

¹⁸ Macaulay Journal, 2, to Selina Mills, 1797, MP HL Box 20.

where the lineaments of the divine character are more fairly or deeply drawn." The older man had of course taken the younger in hand in the post-Jamaica days but by Macaulay's admission "even when he [Babington] has occasion to convey reproof, he contrives to make the motive of love appear so prominent, that even then is one forced to love him most".¹⁹

If his relationship with his brother-in-law started to transform this inhibited and damaged young man by enabling him to love others, love himself and have a healthier relationship with God, this was certainly developed in his letters to his new fiancée during his second spell in Sierra Leone from 1797 to 1799. Not only was he confident enough to reveal his inmost feelings about his early life but she was to be the recipient of some fairly heavy letters over the years.

There is no doubt that for all his boldness at Cowslip Green and afterwards, Zachary lived in continual fear of losing Selina's affection. A large part of this stemmed from his acute sense of guilt and unworthiness, before God and woman, and he no doubt, in the isolation of the Governor's house on Thornton Hill, had a good deal of time for introspection. Hard as he always was on himself, he mentioned the dangers of "wandering thoughts" at a time when his mind should be fixed on God.²⁰ Rather dauntingly he saw Selina's letters and their growing relationship as a power of good working on him, although characteristically he often put it in a convoluted way. Apologising, as well he might, for the "bulk" of a letter in June of that year, he continued:

And now my dear Selina before you begin to read it, I must engage in my service the whole of your candour and indulgence. Indeed your past lenity and forbearance lead me to hope everything from you on this score. I assure you I would not willingly afflict you but in this I am merely selfish, for every disquiet I discover myself to

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Zachary Macaulay to Selina Mills, 1 October 1796, MP HL Box 1.

²⁰ Zachary Macaulay to Selina Macaulay, 20 October 1797, MP HL Box 2.

have made you feel, I feel myself with a tenfold weight. Is it possible I should be so inhuman as to excite with my own hand your bosom? No Selina, attribute to anything but intention every expression which unfortunately may have such a tendency. You must endeavour duly to appreciate the influence on my communications of those rugged materials, of which you are most perhaps enough aware that my frame is composed of which I scarce knew anything of myself, till I began to view myself in your light.²¹

“Those rugged materials” were the very characteristics which he feared would repel Selina. He knew how easily he became angry. “This irritability of temper,” he wrote, “is one of the evils under which I daily and hourly groan, one of the high things in me that have to be cast down.” Taking his cue from St. Paul’s advice to the Church in Philippi, he assured her “such a temper forms no part of the mind which was in Christ” and rather ominously followed this with the statement that “no such temper can be admitted into heaven”. Leaning again on the rather different experience of St. Paul, he asked Selina to assist him by prayer “that this thorn may be made to depart from me”.²² She seemed to cope well with this because he assured her that her letters had not only increased his esteem and affection for her but, he said, “they have helped also to humble me and to soften down a few of the asperities of my rugged nature”.²³

Quick temper was not the only, if the most prominent, fault confessed in this correspondence. Pride, self-flattery, hypocrisy, and curiously “weakness of resolution” all find a place. The first three would not have been surprising to settlers, colleagues, or servants of the Company when they were in disagreement with him but many of them would have wished for a lesser rather than a greater degree of resolution. It probably referred more to his inner life and his self-doubt rather than his relationships with others. Whatever the reason, he

²¹ *Ibid.*, 16 June 1797.

²² Philippians 2.5; II Corinthians 12.7.

²³ Zachary Macaulay to Selina Macaulay, 4–5 February 1797, MP HL Box 2.

promised her that he would indulge in “a copious fund of reflection and improvement”. Again, he feared that he was not up to the mark for her affections. In June he wrote, “I long to hear you say that you still regard me with undiminished affection” and by October he was worried about “The Herculean labour which still waits me of removing these defects” by the time they were to meet again.²⁴

So unbearable was the separation to him that he had to find in it a divine provenance. In the early part of his journal to her in 1797, Zachary had looked back with shame to what he described as “my impatience, my neglect of God, my waywardness and selfishness” and once again alluded to the evil of “unsanctified tempers which then alas had too much prevalence within me”. In what seems to be a willingness to submit to the will of God, but perhaps not with the best of timing, he assured Selina on the anniversary of their engagement “that I can never be enough thankful for the separation however painful in other respects to which he has doomed me”.²⁵ A more secular interpretation would be that it gave them time to sort out the characteristics that might be off-putting to his fiancée.

Theological dialogue, strange alliances, and fanaticism

It was hardly surprising that this still comparatively young man, who had no formal theological training but had come to a strong religious awakening within the circle that had so shaped his life, would be enthusiastic to share his ideas with his betrothed. What is remarkable is the way in which Zachary Macaulay – so often dogmatic and even dictatorial in his relationships – respected, valued and often rejoiced in the contribution of Selina Mills to their theological discussions just as much as he valued her comments on his character and soul.

On 7 February 1796 his letter contained the following information:

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 8–16 June; 20 October 1797.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 22 January 1797.

I shall send you by the coach today a few books which you will oblige me by receiving as friends which are to remind you occasionally of me. I make no doubt of your having seen some of them particularly Doddridges and Witherspoons sermons. I happened to have a spare copy which in case you be already supplied, you may already give away. I think you will like Mr. Head's Evidences. Rippon's hymns are in the main good though many of them are strongly Calvinistic. I have marked a few of them which were peculiarly suited at different times, to the state of my mind. I have sent a copy of the Sierra Leone Report, as being a book you ought not to be without, considering your growing interest in that quarter.²⁶

Such a touching substitute for his absence but a rather formidable one, could have put the relationship on the wrong foot so early in their engagement, while Selina was swamped by these tomes, not least by the last. But she, in reply a few days later, declared that she was delighted with them and would peruse them with interest.²⁷ She did, and a later letter had extensive comments to make.

In the journals and letters exchanged with Selina there is a curious mix of theological attitudes. He had no time for the school of natural theology whose leading exponent, William Paley, had used deductive arguments to prove the existence of God. Despite Paley's strong opposition to the slave trade, on which he wrote a paper in 1789, Macaulay was scathing about him to Selina: "I am glad you don't favour modern philosophy," he wrote, "Paley's philosophy, in my opinion, is nothing more than the present ruinous system (under a fair disguise) which had deluged Europe with blood".²⁸

There was much discussion on and exchange of hymns and hymnbooks. "I much prefer Rippon's hymnbook to the other," he wrote,

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Zachary Macaulay to Selina Mills, 7 February 1796, MP HL Box 1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*; 10 February 1796.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Zachary Macaulay 4–5 February 1797, MP HL Box 2.

with the characteristic caveat, “notwithstanding the decidedly Calvinistic spirit it breathes in many parts”. He preferred the poetry in it as “more choice” though admitting “I by no means profess myself a judge of poetry”. Another hymnbook did not attract him at all and led to a longish theological observation. In this one, he agreed with Selina’s verdict of reservation “some are excellent”. “I don’t know if I’m to blame for my squeamishness,” he admitted, but he did not like the crude appropriation of Christ’s blood for salvation, expressed in phrases such as “one drop of blood on me let fall” and “sink into the purple flood”. Even the index, he said, disgusted him.²⁹

This was an interesting departure from the excessive focus on the blood of Jesus already current in some of the Wesleyan and Watt hymns, which reached its peak in Victorian evangelicalism and has always been favoured in revivalist meetings. Partly it was Zachary’s innate conservatism which rebelled against these expressions, as his father had done in Cardross. But it was in part due to his own developing theology. For all his distaste for natural and rational doctrine, his almost obsessive sense of his own sin and his clear belief that Christ’s atonement on the cross was the key to salvation, he was seeking a less harsh and more humane Christianity. The word “love” was used more frequently in these discussions and in another confessional piece he told Selina:

I used myself to be a keen controversialist, and to advance my dogmas with a most ridiculous, nay with a most sinful confidence. I am learning I hope a little to overcome this evil, and in general I would wish to avoid everything like a peremptory dogmatic tone, more especially on religious points.³⁰

Some settlers and missionaries who were in dispute with him over these years might raise a sceptical eyebrow over that statement, but it did

²⁹ Macaulay Journal, 1, May or June 1797 (not dated but reference to Selina’s letter), MP, HL Box 19.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 31 January 1797.

indicate in principle a much wider perspective. “The gospel of Christ,” he wrote, “seemed to be summed up in a few words, ‘salvation by grace through faith works by love’. To those who were made partakers of such a salvation, I should conceive the opinion they might hold on the finer points, a matter of little moment.”³¹

The lack of dramatic evangelical conversion was partly due to the Babington influence but it was all the more remarkable since for the rest of his life he was one of the Clapham Sect, that influential group of Anglican evangelicals. Macaulay lived in Clapham with his family from 1803 to 1818. The Wilberforces and Stephens were neighbours and all were constantly in touch with the Thorntons in Battersea Rise. Part of the explanation for this lay in the developmental rather than dramatic evangelical Christianity in the group. Many issues united them, not all praiseworthy, and high on the list was the evangelisation of Africa and India, the observance of the Sabbath and the promotion of the Bible, not least for Zachary Macaulay, in France, a land he both loved and feared. This plethora of philanthropic and evangelistic activity was undertaken by a group of men many of whom had been born into privilege and most of whom espoused political conservatism. They had much in common but the issue above all else that bound them all together was the cause of ridding the world of the inhuman traffic in human beings and their enslavement. This overarching concern enabled Zachary Macaulay to make some strange alliances.

The Edinburgh born lawyer, Henry Brougham, later to be Lord Chancellor of England, may have been unfairly styled by Duncan Rice “as religious as a turnip”³² but he was irritated by evangelicalism and espoused a formal religious approach, later on in the nineteenth century defending the system of patronage in the Church of Scotland that finally led to the Disruption.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² C. Duncan Rice, “Controversies over Slavery in Eighteenth- And- Nineteenth Century Scotland” in *Anti-Slavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists*, ed. Lewis Perry & Michael Fellman (Baton Rouge, 1979), 40.

Selina felt strongly that jealousy of his rivalry had led Brougham to treat Thomas Macaulay badly and Thomas was furious with Brougham for his delay in fulfilling a promise of a minor appointment for his father which would have eased the latter's considerable impoverishment by 1830. Zachary would allow none of this and was angry with his son for, as he saw it, challenging his friendship with such a staunch ally in the anti-slavery cause.

Macaulay visited France several times, most notably in 1815 as a representative of the British abolition movement, seeking to influence Britain's envoy, the Duke of Wellington, to demand the abolition of the French slave trade as a condition of the peace settlement. He had many friends in the small French Protestant Church, spoke the language fluently, and in his later years wrote several pamphlets for the *Société Française pour L'Abolition de L'Esclavage* who made him their Honorary President. In 1823 he described visiting the Abbé Grégoire, then living in poverty and isolation, as one of the few persons he had ever met there with "spiritual religion – a sense of abiding responsibility, and a habit of communion with his God and Saviour".³³ This is extraordinary since not only had the man been Bishop of Blois, representing a Roman faith which horrified Macaulay but he had been a member of the Chamber of Deputies in the revolutionary government of which Macaulay had a similar horror. But the old man in 1794 had proposed and carried in the National Assembly the total abolition of slavery, and that, for Macaulay, overcame everything else.

For all that Zachary Macaulay was a shy man and not naturally given to emotional display there were three passions in his life which came to the surface, sometimes in a bizarre way. Anti-Slavery was of course the first and he sought to expose its evils through rational argument but could not avoid intemperate explosions. He could be quite irrational in defence of religion and stray into fanaticism. He was a founder of the Society for the Suppression of Vice whose honest title belied the fact that they harried publishers and those who worked in the

³³ Zachary Macaulay to Selina Macaulay, 19 December 1821, MP HL Box.9.

printing trade when pamphlets were published which did not square with the political or religious conservatism of the Clapham Sect. Macaulay joined with the longtime friend of the Sect, the Bristol poet, educationalist and mentor of the young Selina, Hannah More in 1820, in securing imprisonment and ruin for those who promoted deism or the extension of rights for working men.³⁴

More endearing of course was his often clumsy but hugely expressive letters to Selina throughout the thirty-four years of their relationship. Realising his limitations in expressing his passion for his fiancée through the pen, he decided to resort to other means. In February 1797 he told his fiancée of his plans to send her a parrot from Sierra Leone that he was teaching to say to her “I love you”. One can only imagine the scene if a civil servant entered the study to have a document signed only to find the Governor engaged in mouthing endearments to a bird in a cage! Sadly the bird died and a second one failed to survive the perilous journey. However when Macaulay finally returned to London in 1799 and was prevented from an immediate reunion with Selina in Bristol by abolition business, he sent by cart a third parrot. There is no record of whether the bird either survived or pleased the lady.³⁵

Zachary Macaulay had four sisters in Edinburgh but the one to whom he was closest was Elizabeth, who visited him in London. Elizabeth had become a keen member of the Rev. James Haldane’s congregation. Zachary had earlier expressed anxiety about the Haldane brothers’ apparent rejection of any ecclesiastical authority but their own, for all their evangelical theology. The mixture of his innate social conservatism and horror of exhibitionism in worship made him less and less sympathetic to the Haldanes. In 1808 James Haldane declared

³⁴ Hannah More to Zachary Macaulay, 24 March 1817, 28 Oct 1820, in *Letters of HM to ZM* (London, [1860]) ed. Arthur Roberts, 93; Knutsford, *Life and Letters of Zachary Macaulay*, 361, 362.

³⁵ Zachary Macaulay to Selina Mills, 8–16 June 1797, MP HL Box 2; Zachary Macaulay to Selina Mills, 15 January 1799, University of London Special Collections, 1/5587.

himself to be at one with the Baptists. Elizabeth remained in his congregation, but the tipping point came some years later. Writing to Kenneth in India, Zachary described the time that he, Selina and Tom spent with Elizabeth in Scotland in 1817. Although his sister almost exhausted them by introducing them to all and sundry in the city, including the Haldanes, she made it clear that she had left James Haldane's flock and was now a member of the Rev. William Innes's congregation.³⁶ Zachary related the deciding factor with a touch of approval, if not relish:

Mr. Haldane took it into his head that the kiss of charity was an ordinance of Christian worship with which it would be sinful to dispense. He therefore established it as an indispensable term of communion that at the close of each day's worship the members of his church should salute their neighbours. This proved too great an execution for even Elizabeth's attachment to comply with and she quitted him.³⁷

A proud Scot with a work ethic

For all that Zachary Macaulay had effectively become an Anglican he could not entirely bury his roots and these emerged in various ways. When Hannah More was becoming greatly enamoured about Dr Mansel, the Bishop of Bristol, he told her a story of the bishop's visit to Scotland around 1814. The English prelate found himself and his family in the midst of a Highland storm with no accommodation available in the local inn. The minister of the parish, described by Macaulay as "an old and valued friend of mine", willingly took the bishop and his family

³⁶ The Rev. James Haldane was minister of the Tabernacle Congregational Church in Leith Walk from 1801–1808. This became the Tabernacle Baptist Church in which he ministered from 1808–1851. The Rev. William Innes was his colleague in the Tabernacle Church until 1811 when he became minister of Dublin Street Baptist Church until 1855. Elizabeth Macaulay transferred her membership there.

³⁷ Zachary Macaulay to Kenneth Macaulay, 11 October 1817, Booth Papers, vol. I 5646. University of London.

to the manse. When it came to evening prayers the bishop declined to join in but the elderly minister shamed him and moved him to tears by offering fervent prayers for his visitors and giving them a blessing when they left next morning.³⁸

Years later when the campaign to abolish slavery was at its height Macaulay was always keen to publicise Scotland's contribution to the cause, especially where the Church of Scotland was concerned. In the first 1831 edition of the *Reporter* accounts of anti-slavery meetings in Scotland took up the first forty pages and were followed by this comment by the editor:

Before leaving Scotland for the present, we have to add, with great satisfaction, that this cause has been advocated by the ministers of religion, in that country, both of the established church and other denominations, with peculiar zeal and ability. Keeping the question of slavery, as it out to be kept, distinct from all reference to party politics, the clergy of Scotland, generally, have justly viewed it to be their high duty and privilege to come forward prominently at this conjuncture, to instruct and arouse their people to petition the legislature.³⁹

One element of Calvinism which was exemplified by Zachary Macaulay was the work ethic. When he was in business as a merchant he spent from six in the morning until nine on that work and the remainder of the day was taken up with anti-slavery activity. Late into the night and despite his eyesight (he lost much of the sight of one eye in childhood) he would pore over colonial reports and newspapers, digesting and summarising lengthy documents with a stamina that would defeat those half his age. He continually wrote apologetic letters to Selina about his prolonged absence from home on anti-slavery business as he travelled in England and France.

³⁸ Zachary Macaulay to Hannah More, 26 October 1818, MP HL Box 5.

³⁹ *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, 5 January 1831, 39.

Zachary Macaulay demanded of his oldest son the same standards of continual application. When Thomas Macaulay was staying with his grandfather in Bristol in 1811 he complained about the Maths and Greek exercises sent to him by his father. A week later a long letter arrived from Zachary in Clapham outlining the dangers of sublimating duty and application to "sloth and sensual pursuits" and concluding that "the industrious use of a single hour or two of the day" would be sufficient to make progress. Three years later Thomas addressed lines to his teacher complaining about being made to work in the Easter holidays. He was foolish enough to share these with his father who retorted that he had had more than sufficient holidays from work and characteristically questioned the value of holidays at all, something he had himself avoided in life.⁴⁰

The covert guilt was obvious whenever he took any time away from work or "improving pursuits". "You cannot think what a dissipate afternoon Babington and I spent together yesterday," he wrote to Selina in July 1807. They dined at the Wilberforces and then "sallied forth in quest of pleasure" which involved a conjuror, new mechanical wonders, a demonstration of gas lighting and a female rope-dancer who "curveted for our amusement for some time". To attempt to reassure his wife and perhaps mitigate the feeling of impropriety he concluded "a quarter to twelve came and Babington and I thought that it became married men like us to go home at that hour".⁴¹

Defending equal rights

For all his intolerance with some of the cultural expressions of faith exhibited by the settlers in Sierra Leone and in the face of yet another implied stereotype given by some historians, Zachary Macaulay was

⁴⁰ Zachary Macaulay to Thomas Babington Macaulay, 6 June 1811, MP HL Box 3; Zachary Macaulay to Thomas Babington Macaulay, 15 March 1814, cited in John Clive *Thomas Babington Macaulay The Shaping of an Historian* (London, 1973), 29.

⁴¹ Zachary Macaulay to Selina Macaulay, 4 July 1807, MP HL Box 3. Babington was by this time a Member of Parliament.

ahead of his time in his attitude to race. He started a life-long vendetta with the pro-slavery London magazine *John Bull* when he became the first Governor to institute black juries in Sierra Leone, one of whom sentenced a British sailor to a flogging for killing a duck belonging to a settler. In his journeys into the African interior he clearly enjoyed the friendship and hospitality of African chiefs and they of him, although he was sensible enough not to include in his journal to his new fiancée how he was attracted by a sixteen year old girl in one village to whom he had given half a dollar to dance for him once he had persuaded her to put on some clothes.⁴²

In 1810 Macaulay with two others pursued a legal case in London on behalf of the African Institution against the promoters of a young black woman from the Cape, Saartjie Baartmann, who was on public display in London because of her distinctively large posterior. Macaulay lost the case and was advised by the judge to sue on behalf of public decency since she was hardly clothed. In fact he was more concerned about her coercion and her right to be treated as a person and not as an object, still less as a chattel, which he believed to be the case. He went to great lengths to ascertain whether she was freely willing to be displayed and as such gave her much more respect than those who were using her for financial gain.⁴³

On returning from Sierra Leone, Macaulay brought a number of African children with him. The object was to give them an education and hopefully to send them back as Christian missionaries. A school was set up in Clapham at his instigation and a teacher employed. The sons of others in the Clapham Sect, such as James Stephen and Henry Thornton, attended and by the time Thomas Macaulay and young William Wilberforce came to the African Academy some of those from Sierra Leone served as disciplinarians or monitors, a situation which

⁴² Maria Falconbridge, *Narrative of Two Voyages to the River Sierra Leone during the years 1791–1793* (Liverpool, 2000) ed. Christopher Fyfe, 124–5; Macaulay Journal Diary, 3–4 April 1796, MP HL Box 19.

⁴³ Rachel Holmes, *The Hottentot Venus. The Life of Saartjie Baartman* (London, 2007).

Zachary Macaulay saw as natural but on which the former planter and editor of *John Bull* did not hesitate to pour scorn as an outrage. There was never any question but that the children of the Clapham Sect and the children brought to London from Sierra Leone should receive the same primary education on an equal footing.⁴⁴

In a sense that exemplified so much of this complex man. More than most in his time he genuinely saw others as his equals regardless of class, race or other factors although his innate political conservatism (his oldest son and most of his colleagues in anti-slavery were Tories) allowed him to defer to the rich and powerful. His success in trade gave him a fortune of £100,000 but family ineptitude and profligacy led to his latter years being spent in poverty. Both states he met with calm equanimity, seeing it as part of the divine plan.

Zachary Macaulay saw all of his life under the divine plan but it did not lead him to the damaging conviction that all his judgments were in line with the will of God. The one area where he had absolute conviction, not always about methods, but above all about the rightness of the cause. And that issue was to rid the British Empire and eventually the world, of human chattel slavery. Duncan Rice claimed of an early generation of abolitionists that they used slavery as a convenient anvil on which to hammer out their religious concerns.⁴⁵ Whether or not that was true of any involved in the anti-slavery movement it was indisputably not true of Zachary Macaulay.

North Queensferry

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⁴⁴ Much of the information on the African Academy has been researched by Bruce L. Mouser, "African academy – Clapham 1799–1806", in *History of Education*, Jan. 2004, vol. 33.

⁴⁵ C. Duncan Rice, *The Scots Abolitionists* (Baton Rouge, 1981), 24–26.